

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## He-y, Come on Ou-t!

By Shinichi Hoshi (translated by Stanleigh Jones)  
1978

*Shinichi Hoshi, one of the pioneers of Japanese science fiction, is best known for writing more than 1000 “short-short” stories like this one. In “He-y, Come on Ou-t!”, the residents of a village discover a mysterious hole. **Skill Focus:** In this lesson, you’ll practice analyzing theme. This means paying attention to topics or big ideas that come up in a text and the commentary the story makes on those big ideas. As you read, take note of how the characters view and use the mysterious hole and what this reveals about the relationship between people and nature.*

- [1] The typhoon<sup>1</sup> had passed and the sky was a gorgeous blue. Even a certain village not far from the city had suffered damage. A little distance from the village and near the mountains, a small shrine<sup>2</sup> had been swept away by a landslide.

“I wonder how long that shrine’s been here.”

“Well, in any case, it must have been here since an awfully long time ago.”

“We’ve got to rebuild it right away.”



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- [5] While the villagers exchanged views, several more of their number came over.

“It sure was wrecked.”

“I think it used to be right here.”

“No, looks like it was a little more over there.”

Just then one of them raised his voice. “Hey what in the world is this hole?” Where they had all gathered there was a hole about a meter in diameter. They peered in, but it was so dark nothing could be seen. However, it gave one the feeling that it was so deep it went clear through to the center of the earth.

- [10] There was even one person who said, “I wonder if it’s a fox’s hole.”

“He—y, come on ou—t!” shouted a young man into the hole. There was no echo from the bottom. Next he picked up a pebble and was about to throw it in.

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1. a tropical cyclone; another name for hurricane that occurs in the Indian or western Pacific Oceans  
2. **Shrine** (*noun*): a place or building that is considered holy; a church or chapel

"You might bring down a curse on us. Lay off," warned an old man, but the younger one energetically threw the pebble in. As before, however, there was no answering response from the bottom. The villagers cut down some trees, tied them with rope and made a fence which they put around the hole. Then they repaired to the village.

"What do you suppose we ought to do?"

"Shouldn't we build the shrine up just as it was over the hole?"

- [15] A day passed with no agreement. The news traveled fast, and a car from the newspaper company rushed over. In no time a scientist came out, and with an all-knowing expression on his face he went over to the hole. Next, a bunch of gawking curiosity seekers showed up; one could also pick out here and there men of shifty glances who appeared to be concessionaires.<sup>3</sup> Concerned that someone might fall into the hole, a policeman from the local substation kept a careful watch.

One newspaper reporter tied a weight to the end of a long cord and lowered it into the hole. A long way down it went. The cord ran out, however, and he tried to pull it out, but it would not come back up. Two or three people helped out, but when they all pulled too hard, the cord parted at the edge of the hole.

Another reporter, a camera in hand, who had been watching all of this, quietly untied a stout rope that had been wound around his waist.

The scientist contacted people at his laboratory and had them bring out a high-powered bull horn, with which he was going to check out the echo from the hole's bottom. He tried switching through various sounds, but there was no echo. The scientist was puzzled, but he could not very well give up with everyone watching him so intently. He put the bull horn right up to the hole, turned it to its highest volume, and let it sound continuously for a long time. It was a noise that would have carried several dozen kilometers above ground. But the hole just calmly swallowed up the sound.

In his own mind the scientist was at a loss, but with a look of apparent composure he cut off the sound and, in a manner suggesting that the whole thing had a perfectly **plausible** explanation, said simply, "Fill it in."

- [20] Safer to get rid of something one didn't understand.

The onlookers, disappointed that this was all that was going to happen, prepared to disperse.<sup>4</sup> Just then one of the concessionaires, having broken through the throng and come forward, made a proposal.

"Let me have that hole. I'll fill it in for you."

"We'd be grateful to you for filling it in," replied the mayor of the village, "but we can't very well give you the hole. We have to build a shrine there."

"If it's a shrine you want, I'll build you a fine one later. Shall I make it with an attached meeting hall?"

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3. a business person; a person who manages an area of land and the businesses that operate there

4. **Disperse (verb)**: to leave; to go in different directions

[25] Before the mayor could answer, the people of the village all shouted out.

“Really? Well, in that case, we ought to have it closer to the village.”

“It’s just an old hole. We’ll give it to you!”

So it was settled. And the mayor, of course, had no objection.

The concessionaire was true to his promise. It was small, but closer to the village he did build for them a shrine with an attached meeting hall.

[30] About the time the autumn festival was held at the new shrine, the hole-filling company established by the concessionaire hung out its small shingle<sup>5</sup> at a shack near the hole.

The concessionaire had his cohorts mount a loud campaign in the city. “We’ve got a fabulously deep hole!

“Scientists say it’s at least five thousand meters deep! Perfect for the **disposal** of such things as waste from nuclear reactors.”

Government authorities granted permission. Nuclear power plants fought for contracts. The people of the village were a bit worried about this, but they consented<sup>6</sup> when it was explained that there would be absolutely no above-ground **contamination** for several thousand years and that they would share in the profits. Into the bargain, very shortly a magnificent road was built from the city to the village.

Trucks rolled in over the road, transporting lead boxes. Above the hole the lids were opened, and the wastes from nuclear reactors tumbled away into the hole.

[35] From the Foreign Ministry and the Defense Agency boxes of unnecessary classified documents were brought for disposal. Officials who came to supervise the disposal held discussions on golf. The lesser functionaries,<sup>7</sup> as they threw in the papers, chatted about pinball.

The hole showed no signs of filling up. It was awfully deep, thought some; or else it might be very spacious at the bottom. Little by little the hole-filling company expanded its business.

Bodies of animals used in contagious disease experiments at the universities were brought out, and to these were added the unclaimed corpses of vagrants.<sup>8</sup> Better than dumping all of its garbage in the ocean, went the thinking in the city, and plans were made for a long pipe to carry it to the hole.

The hole gave peace of mind to the dwellers of the city. They concentrated solely on producing one thing after another. Everyone disliked thinking about the eventual consequences. People wanted only to work for production companies and sales corporations; they had no interest in becoming junk dealers. But, it was thought, these problems too would gradually be resolved by the hole.

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5. to “hang out one’s shingle” means to open a small independent business

6. **Consent (verb):** to agree to something

7. a public official

8. **Vagrant (noun):** a person who is homeless or who wanders from place to place

Young girls whose betrothals<sup>9</sup> had been arranged discarded old diaries in the hole. There were also those who were inaugurating new love affairs and threw into the hole old photographs of themselves taken with former sweethearts. The police felt comforted as they used the hole to get rid of **accumulations** of expertly done counterfeit<sup>10</sup> bills. Criminals breathed easier after throwing material evidence into the hole.

[40] Whatever one wished to discard, the hole accepted it all. The hole cleansed the city of its filth; the sea and sky seemed to have become a bit clearer than before.

Aiming at the heavens, new buildings went on being constructed one after the other.

One day, atop the high steel frame of a new building under construction, a workman was taking a break. Above his head he heard a voice shout:

**“He-y, come on ou-t!”**

But, in the sky to which he lifted his gaze there was nothing at all. A clear blue sky merely spread over all. He thought it must be his imagination. Then, as he resumed his former position, from the direction where the voice had come, a small pebble skimmed by him and fell on past.

[45] The man, however, was gazing in idle reverie<sup>11</sup> at the city’s skyline growing ever more beautiful, and he failed to notice.

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9. **Betrothal** (*noun*): engagement to be married

10. **Counterfeit** (*adjective*): fake or imitation

11. a saying that means to look lazily at something without thinking deeply

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which of the following best conveys a theme of the short story?
  - A. When people focus too much on the natural environment, their personal relationships suffer.
  - B. When people spend time reflecting on their past mistakes, they cannot create a better future.
  - C. When people mistreat the environment for selfish gain, they suffer negative consequences.
  - D. When people become consumed by curiosity, they are unable to see the damage they do to others.
  
2. How do the events in paragraphs 16-17 contribute to the development of the theme?
  - A. They imply that there is the likelihood for more success if people work together to solve a problem.
  - B. They imply that there is potential for dangerous consequences if people are reckless with nature.
  - C. They imply that people are uninterested in learning about mysteries in the world.
  - D. They imply that people are wise and cautious when exploring the unknown.
  
3. How do paragraphs 18-20 contribute to the development of the theme?
  - A. They illustrate that the people do not know what will result from their actions.
  - B. They demonstrate how dangerous the hole is to human life and why it must be filled.
  - C. They give an example of how changes in the environment can positively affect human beings.
  - D. They show how people that live in close contact with nature are better able to understand natural changes.
  
4. What does paragraph 38 suggest about the city dwellers' motivations for using the hole?
  - A. They like that the hole lets them keep a tally of all their purchases.
  - B. They like that the hole provides them the opportunity to get rid of harmful distractions.
  - C. They like that the hole allows them to ignore their constant and wasteful consumer habits.
  - D. They like that the hole helps them contribute to making their world cleaner and safer for future generations.

5. Which piece of evidence best illustrates the impact of the villagers' actions?
- A. "You might bring down a curse on us. Lay off,' warned an old man, but the younger one energetically threw the pebble in." (Paragraph 12)
  - B. "Better than dumping all of its garbage in the ocean, went the thinking in the city, and plans were made for a long pipe to carry it to the hole." (Paragraph 37)
  - C. "The police felt comforted as they used the hole to get rid of accumulations of expertly done counterfeit bills." (Paragraph 39)
  - D. "He thought it must be his imagination. Then, as he resumed his former position, from the direction where the voice had come, a small pebble skimmed by him and fell on past." (Paragraph 44)
6. What do paragraphs 41-45 suggest about the villagers' future?
- A. They suggest that the villagers are now able to see the beauty of the nature that surrounds them.
  - B. They suggest that the villagers will begin to face the consequences of their actions.
  - C. They suggest that the villagers will begin to make changes to help the environment.
  - D. They suggest that the villagers are aware of the damage caused by their actions.
7. Identify the theme of "H-ey, Come on O-ut!" and explain how it develops over the course of the story. Use at least three pieces of evidence from the text to support your response.

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